



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Personal Representatives on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 18, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States joins other delegations in welcoming the Personal Representatives back to the Permanent Council and in thanking them for their thoughtful reports.

Ambassador Orhun, Professor Weisskirchen, Ms. Crickley, the United States appreciates very much the important work that you all do to raise awareness and spread support for OSCE/ODIHR efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. When they appear, we are always pleased to see reports in the press of the positive results of your trips and activities in participating States.

Indeed, we would urge you, if anything, to publicize your work more throughout the year if that is possible. Media coverage of your activities is critical to getting the word out to all citizens of OSCE countries that violence and intolerance are simply unacceptable. It is also important to inform citizens, through the media, that their States have undertaken commitments to promote respect for diversity, to work together with civil society, and to ensure democracy, equality, and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedoms of association and of religion or belief.

We appreciate the work that each of you did to help lower tensions in the wake of the controversy over the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed this winter, and to provide ideas for OSCE follow-up.

The Personal Representatives are an important link between OSCE institutions and civil society organizations that fight intolerance at the grassroots level in participating States. Therefore, we support the work that Ambassador Orhun, in particular, has done in organizing two NGO roundtables. The most recent, on May 9th, provided invaluable recommendations to Muslim NGOs for countering negative stereotypes and improving public perceptions through active engagement with the media.

We encourage Ms. Crickley and Professor Weisskirchen to consider organizing similar small-group roundtables with organizations that fall within their mandates. Of course, the United States also looks forward to the larger NGO meeting that will precede the Almaty tolerance meeting on June 11th. The NGO meeting should provide a useful opportunity for representatives of different cultural, ethnic and religious communities to learn from one another's experiences. This was a key recommendation stemming from Ambassador Orhun's May 9th roundtable in Warsaw.

In addition to civil society capacity building, the Personal Representatives have a key role to play in supporting the ODIHR Program on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. The ODIHR program is doing excellent work in the fields of education, law enforcement training, legislation review, and data collection. The Personal Representatives should increase their efforts to build political will in participating States to utilize the assistance that ODIHR can provide. They can also collect useful best practices from participating States and share these with other States, with ODIHR, and with NGOs.

Ms. Crickley, Professor Weisskirchen, and Ambassador Orhun, your work on behalf of the OSCE to raise awareness and spread best practices is a vital component of our common effort to promote tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for diversity. We look forward to hearing more from you in Almaty and wish you success with the activities that you have planned for the rest of this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.